



Delaware River Shad

During the month of May, American Shad have made their migration from the Atlantic Ocean into Northampton County's portion of the Delaware River. To greet this member of the herring family, the City of Easton hosts the Forks of the Delaware Shad Fishing Tournament and Festival, complete with the Doo Dah Parade and the Shad Cook Out.

The fishing tournament is a big deal. Cash prizes are awarded for the heaviest fish caught each day and additional prizes are awarded to the largest fish caught during the week long contest. Considering the prizes and the year long bragging rights bestowed upon prize winners, anglers take their shad fishing quite seriously at this time of year.

I have heard and read a lot about this event over the years, so I was eager to patrol the Delaware River's shorelines and see the action firsthand. On the last day of the 2008 tournament, the action turned out to be a little better than I expected.

I pulled into Easton's Scott Park where the tournament weigh station is located and was immediately greeted by weigh station volunteers displaying looks of concern on their faces. They were quick to inform me that two gentlemen fishing from a boat may have illegally caught and registered a shad. What made the situation worse was that the registered fish was the largest of the day up to that point and stood to win the top prize money.

I asked for a brief description of the incident and was told the fish had been registered at the weigh station early in the afternoon. The two individuals left the area for approximately an hour and a half. They returned to the water aboard the boat and one of them was displaying a

fishing license which had not been noticed by other anglers earlier in the day.

After I obtained information on the individual that registered the fish, I called the boat to shore, so I could question the two gentlemen. I asked how the registered shad had been caught, and I was told the boat owner had hooked the fish and fought it to within netting distance of the back of the boat. The passenger tried to net the fish, but he could not reach over the back of the boat and net the fish because he was suffering from a hernia. Seeing this, the operator passed the rod to the passenger. The passenger then fought the shad until the operator was able to net the fish and get it in the boat. The passenger then took the fish, which weighed over 6 lbs., to the weigh station to be registered as he was the one that landed the fish.

After looking at the passenger's fishing license it didn't take long to figure out why both men left the water for an hour and a half after the shad was registered. The time and date stamp on the back of the license revealed the license was bought that day at 2:20 p.m. Weigh station records showed the fish had been weighed at 1:30 p.m., however, which meant the passenger was fishing without a license when he took control of the rod and landed the shad.

Because the shad was caught illegally, it was disqualified from the tournament and the gentleman was issued a citation for fishing without a license and possessing an illegal fish. If you consider this gentleman lost the \$100.00 prize money he stood to win, bought a resident fishing license in an effort to cover up the fact he had been fishing illegally and had to pay his fines, this turned out to be an expensive attempt to win some money and gain tournament notoriety. ☐



Photos: Art Michaels